

# Listen

## A Seeker's Resource for Spiritual Direction

O C T O B E R 2 0 1 5

V O L 9 : I S S U E 4

### BE STILL: AWAKEN YOUR HEART

**"D**oing nothing is sometimes doing something," wrote Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. "To meditate is not to run away from life but to take the time to look deeply into ourselves or into a situation. Meditation is an opportunity to take care of our body or mind. That is why it's so important. We allow ourselves the time to calm our thinking, to sit, to walk, to breathe—not doing anything, just going back to ourselves and what is around us. We allow ourselves time to release the tension in our body and our mind. Then we can take time to look deeply into ourselves and into the situation we are in."

I landed in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, on Molokai—an island in the Hawaiian Island chain. It was June and time to return to my center. I would gather for seven days with ten men and women I had yet to meet, and a retreat guide, Paula D'Arcy, who offered the invitation to show up in order to be present to ourselves, the land, and one another. We had two strict instructions: "do not reveal your work in the world," and "do not reveal your faith or spiritual tradition—if you identify with one." Our time together focused on listening, curiosity, tenderness, and an awakened heart—core to our humanity and central to the ancient contemplative practice of spiritual direction.

I arrived wounded; the week was a crucial time for me to retreat and return to my essence, prior to major



Hoopoe — *Upupa epops*

shoulder surgery. Once again, I was going too fast, for too long, with demanding work and my own set of *should, must do*, and too many *yes* responses. I was exhausted and in physical pain. I could not talk about my work or my internal struggle with a God whom I no longer encountered in once familiar and beloved forms, but who is now simply an animating spirit in life I experience as love.

The discovery of our common ground with each other began. Laughter, conversation, and shared silence flowed among introverts and extroverts. A growing tenderness and interdependence took root without ever naming the ways we were present in the world through our service, advocacy, and work. We sat quietly in a circle several times a day, then responded to, *what are you present to?* D'Arcy offered poems, music, and stories to provide a platform for us to listen and be transformed.

One morning, the topic of our patterns and habits was posed, together with words from photojournalist Dewitt Jones, "If our patterns go too long

unquestioned, they become our prison." A provocative topic: what are the patterns and behaviors that keep us from loving and living with authenticity and integrity? We offered dozens of ideas, then each chose five patterns to interrupt in our own life, and upon our return home, to restart and reboot. Mine include *being nice*, *hurrying*, *analyzing*, *consuming*, and *resisting*—topics I will explore with my spiritual director in coming months.

The last morning, two of us who would have surgery upon returning home were asked to sit in the center of the circle. Ten men and women gathered in silence around us, standing sentinels offering prayer, their now familiar eyes giving care and comfort. The day of my surgery, and in these subsequent weeks of being unable to hurry, not feeling very nice, resisting my physical condition, and rebooting life, I recall being seated in the center of a loving presence that promises "doing nothing is sometimes doing something."

—Pegge Erkeneff

#### SEEDS OF INTEREST:

- Field Guide: Contemplative practice
- Field Notes: Deep listening
- Global Resources
- Poem: *The Dance*
- Ask Owl

## CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE: SEEK HARMONY

**F**ind a place of inner expansion—take a slow inhalation, then let your breath go, completely. Breathe in again, fully expanding your lungs and belly, let go. Continue several times.

With deliberation and intention, read this text aloud:

“Seek harmony, not balance. The idea of “balance” has never been useful to me, as if I could cut my life into pieces and measure their worth on a scale. At the same time, whenever I have tried to “lean in,” I’ve fallen down. I want to stand up straight, grounded in the earth, and pour my love into my partner, children, friends, family, and the communities I serve. I want to gauge my success by how well I have loved. I don’t want balance. I want harmony. I want to let my life flare up. I want to let my life sing. I want to hear your life sing. Because everyone’s song is a symphony.” —Valarie Kaur

Pause. Become aware of any sensation in your body. Simply notice. Place your hands where you experience sensation.

**AGAIN, READ THE TEXT ...**

Pause. Allow feelings to rise in you. Acknowledge emotions without judgment. Breathe deeply.



**AGAIN, READ THE TEXT ...**

Take a breath, then ask yourself, “What word, phrase, or image comes to mind?” Place your hands over your heart. Pause.

**AGAIN, READ THE TEXT ...**

Invite your body to move into any sensation. You may choose stillness, you might stand, or dance, clench and unclench your hands, move

your arms, legs, belly, pelvis, shoulders, neck, hips, knees, toes. Give yourself permission to find a rhythm, and stay with it for several minutes.

**READ THE TEXT ONE LAST TIME ...**

Conclude by offering thanksgiving for whatever transpired, in a way that is appropriate for you. Perhaps with a word or phrase, a deep cleansing breath, movement, gesture, or sound. What is revealed to you? Is there something you will carry forward in your awareness for the next several hours? 🌱

### GLOBAL RESOURCES : Supporting Your Spiritual Journey

**8-10 January 2016**

**Terry Hershey: “Find Your Sanctuary”**

Spiritual Direction Colorado (SDCO)  
2016 Annual Spirituality Conference  
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Free half-hour SDI teleconference  
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**Emerging Wisdom**

San Diego, California, USA  
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More information and registration at [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org)

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Everyone who cares about spiritual companionship is invited to become a member of Spiritual Directors International, a nonprofit charity serving the educational needs of seekers and people who offer spiritual companionship. [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org)

● Connect on Facebook: *Spiritual Directors International for spiritual care*, <http://on.fb.me/SDIFacebook>

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# EMERGING WISDOM

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## DEEP LISTENING: WHAT SHIFT HAPPENS WITHIN YOU WHEN SOMEONE DEEPLY LISTENS AS YOU SHARE PART OF YOUR LIFE'S SACRED STORY?

### *Spiritual Directors International members respond*

*"When someone is truly and deeply listening to me, I am filled with gratitude. I am grateful that we have slowed down enough to share, and that I have been given the respect of being listened to. I am willing to be vulnerable enough to share my life. I am willing to trust the listener. I am willing to receive the blessings and love that come my way when I am listened to. More, I love learning what listening looks like so I can give the gift to someone else."*

—Martha Wharton, Maryland, USA

*"The doors that seemed shut up for many years opened, and I could see light in the unspoken places of my life. I came into this room and was heard deeply and felt the energy constellated and trust emerged, and I wanted to say so much more. Being a very private introvert, I do not share much of my story with anyone. However, this anam cara [spiritual companion] listened deeply as I ventured to tell a few superficial facts about me. Feeling that empathy, struck a chord of reconciliation and a movement occurred,*

*which led me to seek more listening from this soul-friend. I came frozen in time, I left liberated into a future."*

—Evan Ardley, California, USA

*"The shifts that happen within myself when someone deeply listens to my sacred story is three-fold. First I am so grateful, not only that God delivered me, literally, from depression, but that what was intolerable living actually became my life purpose to help others. The second shift is one of the heart: that my story influences in others a deeper intention to seek a relationship with a God of compassion, a God of hope. Thirdly, sacred listening has shifted and expanded my consciousness of unity of all beings in Presence."*

—Sharon Highberger, Kansas, USA

*"I am able to hear the wisdom that already lives in me as my higher self. As I speak, I listen to what I am saying (which is often difficult for me in everyday conversation, or even in solitary prayer), and hear the meaning both under*

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# FIELD NOTES, CONTINUED

*and above my words. Spiritual direction allows me to hear what I mean and therefore choose the next step forward on my journey.*

—Maggie Rosche, Florida, USA

*"I feel as though I am being "listened into wholeness." I figure out what I am really thinking; I obtain new perspective on life's issues; I feel validated and affirmed; I find peace and contentment in my soul."*

—Alice A. Holstein, Wisconsin, USA

*"We know that we are not alone. We know that what it means to be a human-being is a shared experience beyond religion, beyond words."*

—Keith Beasley, Anglesey, UK

*"When someone deeply listens to me I share feelings, ideas, experiences that I didn't even know were present. I feel valued and worth someone's time and attention. It is such a grace to be listened to and, then, in turn, to listen deeply to another."*

—Anne Marie Lom, OSF, Wisconsin, USA

*"The shift is like a kaleidoscope, when turned some colors recede, others grow more brilliant. So does my spirit as I turn my sacred story, the brilliant light of an all-encompassing God becomes another aha moment, greater than I. It's awesome."*

—Carolyn Della Pietra, Connecticut, USA

*"The shift that happens within me is one of deep heart-to-heart connection, which enables me a special freedom to*

*speak without fear; but instead with a certain amount of trust and confidence and vulnerability."*

—Mary Jo Blankemeyer, Ohio, USA

*"Recently my husband has had several rather serious health problems. I discovered that I "wasn't myself." I was just a vast sea of various tumultuous emotions. At my peer supervision group for spiritual guides, one of our members suggested that I have time to share. I experienced deep listening on the part of the other members, and was able to weep and let go some. It was wonderful that they didn't try to fix me—they just held everything I said in sacred space. I felt new hope."*

—Lyn Holley Doucet, Louisiana, USA

*"When someone listens to me I feel heard, I feel validated and most of all I feel nurtured and cared for. Life is so very precious and fragile, and we take so many things for granted. We are constantly on a treadmill, looking for the next thing to do. When someone stops and listens, they are present, and I feel that in my whole being. I look in their eyes, and I feel the connection running through my whole body, and we both know that we are present, connecting, and for that moment there is a sharing between us that we feel known by one another, and we are emotionally attuned to each other. All our senses are alert and focused on the person listening and really getting what I am saying."*

—Toni Parker, California, USA

*"I feel more alive. And I am drawn to be my most authentic self, the self that God would have me be."*

—Paul Soderquist, Arizona, USA

*"I experienced being listened to so deeply that I was drawn deep, deep down into the cave of my own depths (or heart, or soul). What was touched there was beyond my understanding. At that moment, a very profound joy surged through my entire being that tears just flow and kept flowing for I don't know how long... I found myself walking out from the building into the streets crying—the tears just kept flowing. Reaching my room, I felt a very deep peace in and around me."*

—Maria Eulalia G. Banawis, RVM,  
National Capital Region, Philippines

## Listen

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**Executive Director:** Liz Budd Ellmann, MDiv  
**Editor:** Pegge Erkeneff  
**Production Supervisor:** Tobias Becker  
**Submissions:** [listen@sdiworld.org](mailto:listen@sdiworld.org)  
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*Listen* is an outreach publication of Spiritual Directors International. When you visit the SDI website at [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org), you can learn about retreats, programs, conferences, and other educational events related to spiritual companionship. You can read descriptions of the spiritual direction relationship from a variety of spiritual traditions,

and discover excellent questions to ask yourself and any potential spiritual directors you choose to interview. To locate a spiritual director or guide, go online to *Seek and Find Guide: A Worldwide Resource of Available Spiritual Directors*. More than 5,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org).



# The Dance

Things are changing.  
Slowly, and without much fanfare,  
The movement of the soul  
Begins its dance.

At first the notes ascend lightly  
And linger in the ear;  
Tantalizing in their simplicity  
Gracefully calling,  
“It’s time to open yourself  
And leave the safety of your hiding.”

My heart hears, however faintly  
And knows it’s true.  
My feet, slower to catch on,  
Sit planted, keeping time,  
Biding time.

Rise up, oh love,  
Have you failed to remember  
The hope of being desired,  
The beauty of being chosen?

His hand is extended  
The choice is now mine.  
I feel my stubborn will giving way  
To impassioned desire.

Here, caught in the arms of eternity  
I leave my place of redundancy  
And let myself enjoy the dance  
As love’s boldness  
Sweeps me off my fear.

—Linda Tarman



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# ASK OWL

**Q**uestion: *I'm interested in spiritual direction with a group. Can you describe the difference between meeting with a group in contrast to one-on-one spiritual guidance?*

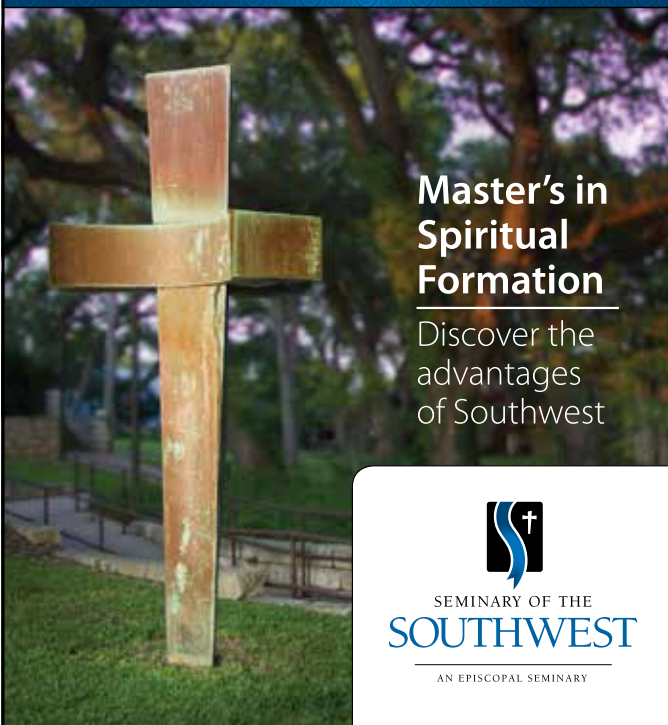


**H**oot Hoot: Group spiritual direction is a powerful alternative to individual, one-on-one spiritual guidance. A healthy group will make a commitment to: compassionate listening on behalf of one another; confidentiality and respect; and vulnerability to share one's own story in the context of the shared time. Generally, a group meets every four to six weeks, for two to two-and-a-half hours. A group could be facilitated by a spiritual director who does not participate with personal disclosure, or by a spiritual guide who also is fully involved in the process in the same way as everyone who is present. A group process might include a rhythm of shared silence, presentation by a person, reflection, response, and shared silence. This rhythm would be repeated for everyone present. Alternatively, a group might choose a common text or creative process in order to evoke personal reflection and responses.

Several benefits to group spiritual direction are often overlooked. Group spiritual direction can be helpful in locales where very few spiritual directors live. Group spiritual direction cultivates compassion in community—we hear sacred life stories from each other and realize we are not alone in our feelings and experience of growing in relationship with the Mystery many name God. Intergenerational groups can be especially life-giving. Group spiritual direction helps us focus on others, and become less self-centered. Spiritual guidance is never a time for direct problem solving, and this is specifically true in group spiritual direction. Safety and confidentiality is crucial, and no one should ever feel judged, or as if they received a list of follow-up action items. Thus, finding an experienced spiritual director, and making a commitment to a contemplative encounter are recommended. Group spiritual direction creates time for connection, community, and developing the contemplative qualities of listening, receptivity, and being present. 🦉

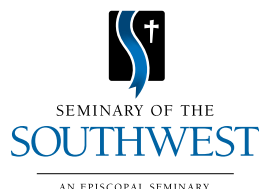
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“Tending the holy around the world and across traditions ...

Al servicio de lo sacro alrededor del mundo y a través de las tradiciones ...”

—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio



## Multi-faith Pilgrimage to Iona

4–11 JUNE 2016

# LISTENING

to the Wisdom of the Island



PILGRIM GUIDES: SALLY TAYLOR,  
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